

## An extract from 'Jody' by Ian Berry

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The house we were going to was on a hill. I say house, it was a ruddy mansion. You could have fit my house into it umpteen times.

Lisa looked down at her Angels suit. "I'm glad we can make something more - appropriate - appear."

Louise put her hand on Lisa's arm. "Don't worry so. Mummy and Daddy won't, so neither should you."

Lisa smiled. "We'll make the effort later on. We have plans."

The cars pulled up to the front door. It had taken several minutes to get through the electric gates and travel down the huge drive, I think the M1 is longer and wider - but I'm not at all sure. Arnie didn't get to come in with us, but he'd be ok. As far as I could tell he was bossing the French chaps around unmercifully. No more time to think about that, we were about to be introduced to Louise's mum and dad. Louise herself did the introductions, remembering all our second names and everything. She was really quite impressive.

Louise couldn't compete with Lisa in Director mode. Holly and I stood just behind her. When you can speak mind to mind, co-ordinated curtsies are no problem.

"We are very pleased to meet you. It has been a pleasure to protect your daughter."

"Yes. We hear your protection was actually necessary. You have our thanks." Then the member of the Royal Family went away and a concerned father took his place. "Enough of that. Tell us what happened? I heard there was a lot of gunfire."

Lisa grinned as she answered for all three of us. "There were rather a lot of bullets whizzing about the countryside."

Louise was bobbing up and down excitedly. "But none of them in with us. Holly makes them all vanish. Jody was brilliant. She shot at them with a *machine gun!*"

"Doesn't matter where the bullets came from, they still got teleported to the outside of the train," said Lisa. "All the byplay and noise gave enough time for Arnie and Jim to recover. They had handcuffs."

"But who were they?"

"Ah. You don't know yet? They were from ETA. I'm sure Arnie and Jim will be doing official reports quite soon. They'll probably have more details than we have."

"Lisa? How did ETA know who, what, and where?" I 'said'.

"Good point," 'said' Lisa, then she went on in a normal voice, "One thing that concerns us is how ETA knew about your daughter's travel arrangements. What's also interesting is how the Ministry knew they needed our services in the first place. We can't answer either of those questions, but perhaps you should be asking the people who might know for their opinions."

"Good point. I'll be talking to Mr. Nichols - Arnie - later. I'll see what he can find out. What, my dear?"

"Daddy, can Arnie stay here for a few days? He did get beaten up."

"Oh, I'd think that can be arranged." He turned to us, "Will you three be ok going home on your own?"

"Yes," said Lisa. "We plan to go home under our own power, if you see what I mean. You have been told about the other stuff we can do?"

"I'm told you can levitate."

Lisa grinned. "We usually call it flying. This is levitating." She let herself lift about six inches into the air. She shrugged. "What else can you call going from one place to another through the air at high speed, but flying?"

"How fast can you go," asked Louise.

"We're not actually sure", said Holly. "We think our top speed is a little under a thousand miles an hour. That's about MACH 1.5, one and a half times the speed of sound."

Louise's eyes grew big and round as saucers. "Oh, wow. No wonder you don't want to go on the train." Then she had another thought. "Daddy? I've told the Angels they're to join us for dinner."

Interesting. Not a question. Lady Louise was already sufficiently sure of herself to be certain that her dad would simply agree with her.

"Yes. Girls? Will you join us for dinner ..."

Lisa knew exactly what the pause was for at the end of that sentence. "We'll be pleased to join you," then she looked down at herself. "We can do ever so much better than this as well. We just need a room to get changed?"

"Ah, that is not a problem. Chris' house has lots and lots of those. You'll meet Chris later. Now, it's getting late. We should get ready for dinner. Will an hour be enough time?"

"Yes sir. More than enough. May we be shown to our room?" asked Lisa.

There was no obvious signal given, but a chap in a white shirt with a bowtie appeared. Some quick words in French, far too quick for me anyway, and he vanished, to reappear almost at once with Emily behind him. Emily gathered up Louise and they left to do whatever was required. Bowtie approached us.

"M'mselles? If you would be kind enough to follow me?" His English was excellent - with an accent to send shivers down your back - if you're a girl at any rate!

He led us back into the huge hall at the front of the house, pointing out the direction to the dining room as we went. Then up the stairs and along a couple of corridors to a row of doors.

"This will be your room. We have been unable to find any luggage obviously belonging to you. Will you be ok?"

Lisa turned on Sweet Smile Number Seven. "It will not be a problem. Thank you so much for your help."

Bowtie nodded and withdrew, leaving us to explore the room. It had two huge beds in it and an ensuite bathroom.

"Oh yes. This'll do nicely," said Lisa. "Right. We have an hour. Not enough time for complicated hair. Brush it 'til it shines and it'll have to do. First job, ring home, don't forget the plus four four bit. Red alert for the kitchens tomorrow, and remember to mention that stuff will be whizzing about. Anybody sitting on our beds may get covered in stuff."

A little concentration saw my mobile phone sitting in my hand instead of sitting on the little table in the hall where it usually lived. I rang home and got Mum.

"Hi Mum. Me."

"Hello Jody. Not a problem is there?"

"No Mum. Don't panic. We've repelled all the boarders, the baddies are in custody somewhere in France and we're getting ready for a formal dinner."

"Oh. Sounds nice. What're you going to do? Make your long frock come to you?"

"Something like that, yes. There'll be stuff flying about. Don't leave anything on my bed, that'll be ground zero for anything I send back. Err, we'll be home quite early tomorrow. We've decided to fly back. Take a couple of hours or less. Be all day if we take the train."

"I see. Need the kitchen running full blast I suppose?"

"Yes please Mum."

"No problem. You enjoy yourself tonight."

"I will Mum. Got to go. Love to you and Dad."

And Mum was gone. As I watched, Lisa and Holly put their phones down at almost the same time. Lisa issued orders. "Right Angels. Into the shower. Do we each know where our hairdryers are at home?"

"I've got one in my bag," I said.

"Not much good for all three of us. I know where mine is. Holly?"

"In my hand is where mine is." And it was. While Lisa had been speaking, Holly'd 'fetched' hers from her bedroom at home.

Despite there being only the one shower, we were ready in short order. Wrapped in towels, we took turns drying and brushing hair. Holly'd been really clever and 'fetched' shampoo and conditioner. Lisa and I hadn't thought of that. Holly shared. She's a star.

With suitable underwear 'told' to be here with us, last thing was the dresses themselves. We gave each other a hand with zips and fastenings and stuff.

"Blimey Holly. You look marvellous," Lisa said.

"Why, thank you. One tries."

General Lisa reviewed the troops. "We should be really pleased and proud of ourselves. Ready to meet royalty?"

"Yep. Lead on Macduff."

Holly looked perplexed for a moment, then, "Ah. Shakespeare. You doing Macbeth in English Lit?"

"Holly? Did you know that or have you just discovered you know it?"

"Dunno. It's true though, isn't it?"

"Mm. Interesting."

"English Lit later. A grand entrance now. Ok?"

Holly and I both said "Yes Lisa," more or less together. That made us giggle slightly. Lisa looked at us and shook her head - then spoiled it by giggling with us.

Each using one hand to lift the hem of our dresses slightly, the three of us made our way down the stairs. From there to the dining room was just down a short corridor. Most of the others were already there, including a couple we didn't know.

Louise's dad jumped up as we came into the room, as did the other man who had to be Chris, the owner of the house.

"You said you were making an effort, but I didn't expect *this*."

Louise looked smug. "See, Daddy? I told you it'd be all right."

"Yes you did. And next time I'll believe you." He turned to us. "Girls, you look wonderful. Thank you for being here tonight."

Lisa did a deep curtsy, really quite impressive in her long frock. Holly and I did the same, the slightest of delays while Lisa told us what she wanted us to do apparently went completely unnoticed.

"We are honoured that you invited us. Thank you."

"Hm. Thank you. My daughter invited you though, not me."

Lisa turned to Lady Louise. There was a repeat of the curtsy. "You have our thanks, M'lady."

Lady Louise jumped to her feet and ran to Lisa. She grabbed Lisa's hand in hers and hauled her to her feet. "It is I who must thank you." Then she turned to her father. "Daddy? If they call me M'lady again, can you throw them out?" Then she giggled.

That set the tone for the rest of the evening. We were properly introduced to Chris and Angela, his wife. Louise's dad and Chris had been at uni together. Everybody wanted to know how we did what we did and were disappointed when we couldn't tell them.

"There's a whole Institute full of people working hard to find out just that," grinned Lisa. "We just get on with it."

"Well, we're glad you do 'just get on with it'," said Louise's mum.

Courses came and went. We managed to always use the correct fork and what have you. All three of us refused the wine which circulated freely. Luckily, they'd been expecting Louise, whose favourite tippie was coke. She shared with us, so that was ok. It was about three courses in that the brown stuff hit the windmill.

## Twenty

Holly suddenly stopped eating, a forkful of potato halfway to her mouth. "Problems. Link up Angels. Intruders in the grounds. If your guards need to be alerted, you should do it quickly."

Holly had used ordinary words, presumably so the others would know what was happening. Lisa did the same. "Armed?"

"Yes. We need to go to the front door."

Lisa didn't argue. She got up at once. So did I. Picking up the hem of my dress, I hurried out of the room. The three of us gathered on the steps outside the building.

Linked with Holly, I could plainly 'feel' the weapons of the men hiding in the bushes.

Lisa had us wait. "If we make a move now, they'll rush us. We need the security people," she 'said'.

I could see stuff happening out of the corner of my eye, then Arnie appeared beside us.

"What can Holly see?"

Holly answered for herself. "There are eleven men - well - eleven guns - spread out in the trees in front of us. Arnie, there are four more at the back of the house. Do you have men there?"

"Yes. D'you want them to try and take out the four men?"

"No! No gunfire!" said Lisa. Jody? Can you collect their weapons from here?"

"Mm. Show me Holly. Ah. Yep. Now?"

"Now."

One by one I 'told' the four men's guns to stop being in their hands but to be in mine. I put each one on the ground at my feet as they appeared in my hand. Lisa watched for number four.

"Right Arnie, tell the boys at the back to go."

Arnie muttered into a radio in French. "Right, that should sort that out. What about the ones in front of us?"

"Same trick," said Lisa.

It was as I collected gun number two that it all went wrong. There was a scuffle in the bushes in front of us - and gunshots. That seemed to be the cue for everybody in front of us to begin shooting at once.

Holly stood with a grin on her face as she began sending bullets in all directions. Lisa tried to speak to Arnie, but he couldn't hear over the sound of gunfire. She grabbed his radio and shouted into it, "Se coucher sur le sol, maintenant!"

I didn't understand what she said but I understood what she *meant*. If our boys heard that order, they'd drop to the ground, nicely out of the line of fire. The baddies hadn't heard that, so wouldn't do it. Clever girl, Lisa.

"Lisa, incoming. It's a rocket or a missile."

"Ok Holly. Jody? Turn it to our right. That'll take it out to sea."

I took what the missile 'felt' like from Holly, then turned it through a neat right angle. It shot off to the side, if Lisa said that was out to sea, then it was.

"Why are they still shooting?" 'asked' Lisa.

"Because the ricochets are hitting the trees", I said. "It must seem like we're returning fire."

"Oh. Holly? Can you make them all hit the lawn instead?"

"Yep. Done that." The noise didn't change all that much where we were, but it was presumably different inside the tree cover.

"Ok Jody. Start collecting guns."

"My pleasure." One by one, I increased the pile of handguns on the ground in front of me as I 'took' their location from Holly and 'told' them to change position. I collected several assault rifles and a couple of machine guns that way as well.

"Another missile."

"Same thing Jody."

"I'm on it." Another missile went whizzing out to sea. I'd had enough of this. "Holly? Where's that damn missile launcher?"

"Shoulder-mounted bazooka-thing. There, see?"

"Yeah. Got it. Come to Mama." Suddenly I had what felt like a tonne weight on my shoulder. The bloody bazooka! I staggered sideways - to fetch up against Arnie, who grinned and took the thing off me.

"Thanks Arnie," I 'said' - then had to say it again in normal speech as I realised Arnie hadn't heard the first time.

Just a few seconds after I'd 'collected' the bazooka, the gunfire stopped. Holly 'said', "That's it. Anything else belongs to our chaps."

"Right. Arnie, your guys can go and collect anybody who hasn't run away."

That should have been that. Didn't happen that way at all. The idiots tried to rush us. About five or six of them ran out of the trees towards us. I could deal with that, no problem. A couple of the bigger guns I'd collected were machine guns, like the one I'd fired on the train. I quickly scooped one up from the pile in front of me, pointed it at the men - and pulled the trigger.

I was a bit more ready for the recoil this time but I still blew leaves off the trees. Didn't matter, the men dropped flat on the ground. That stopped them running towards us - result!

Trouble was, there weren't all that many rounds left in the magazine, and our terrorists noticed this. As the last shot rang out, they began to get up again. Didn't bother me, I had a whole arsenal round my feet. Another machine gun, more leaves missing off the trees - and men flat on the floor again.

"Arnie? Tell your men to just come and get these numpties. Holly's making the bullets miss anyway. They'll not get hurt."

"Sorry Lisa. I can tell them that, but they probably won't believe me."

"Ok. All three of us pick up guns. Jody, you take a machine gun, Holly two handguns." As she said this, Lisa picked up a couple of pistols herself. "Right. Walk towards them. Arnie? Shout 'hands up' or whatever in French."

Perhaps it was the sight of three heavily-armed young girls in evening dresses walking towards them, or maybe it was just Arnie growling at them in French. Either way, the intruders got to their feet and stood in a group with their hands up. They were quickly joined by all their friends who'd been rounded up by the rest of Arnie's little army. There were more than enough good guys to take care of the bad guys, especially as the latter group were now disarmed. I thought about how my method of disarming them wouldn't have helped, one second holding a nice big gun, next second holding nothing. I felt sorry for them - for all of one second. These people had been actively trying to kill us!

Lisa was speaking, normal speech. "Can we leave you to sort them out Arnie? I think you might have reinforcements any second anyway."

For the last minute or so, I'd been aware of sirens approaching through the night. Probably the local Gendarmes coming to see what all the nasty noise was all about.

"Come on Angels. Let's go make sure everybody's ok in the house," said Lisa.

We dropped the guns we'd collected back onto the pile on the bottom of the front steps, lifted the hems of our dresses, and made our way up the steps and back in through the front door - to be almost knocked over by Louise trying to hug all three of us at once.

"You were brilliant! Those men stood *no* chance!"

Lisa managed to extract herself from Louise. She turned to Louise's parents, gave a little dip of a curtsy, and asked, "Are you all ok in here sir?"

"We're fine, thank you." He stuck out his hand. Lisa took it and shook it gently.

"I'm glad. Hopefully nobody got hurt - apart from your poor trees and lawn Chris."

"You save us all from certain death and you're worried about trees?" laughed Chris. "How do you do it? I thought you'd had it when I saw the rocket heading for you. It just turned and - went away."

Holly answered for herself for a change, although the people she was talking to probably had no idea it was her abilities we were using. "We actually have no idea how it works. That it does work is obvious - we're still here. There are a lot of people back in England working to try to find out just what you've asked us."

Chris laughed gently. "Don't know about you lot, but I need a drink. Back to the dining room?"

Now I became aware of a certain lack in the energy supply department. "Err, Chris? Do you mind terribly if we ask for more food as well as a drink?"

He looked startled so I went on, "I'm sorry, but what we do takes energy. We need to refuel after something as intense as that. I'm working on a way to let us recharge by plugging us into the wall, but until then we need to eat." Then I repeated, "Sorry."

"Heavens, don't be sorry. Not after what you've just done. Come on, back to the dining room, quick march."

Orders were obviously issued, because there was a lot of running about, followed by three more large plates of the roast beef main course we'd just been working our way through. There was quiet while the others watched us scoff. We weren't quiet, but there was no sound naturally.

"Hoo. That was actually fun," 'said' Holly.

Lisa poured cold water on that. "Those men were trying to kill us. Without our abilities, we'd have been ex-angels. Serious stuff, this."

"You're right. Sorry Lisa," 'said' Holly.

"We've discovered more stuff today," I 'said'.

"How d'you mean?" 'asked' Lisa.

"Well, Holly can now detect weapons out to quite some distance - and tell if the owner is a threat or not. She even knew which were cops."

Lisa thought about this. "And you. You can get details of the threat, such as a gun or a rocket launcher, directly from Holly in order to deal with it."

"Mm. You're right. No slouch yourself either Lisa. You direct the whole thing. I could feel you telling me which guns to go for first."

"I didn't seem to do much at all. I thought I was just supplying support and energy."

I had the answer to this. "You don't expect an army general to actually fight, do you? No, he, or in this case she, coordinates all the effort for maximum effect. That's what you do, and bloody well too."

Lisa looked down at her plate. "But ..."

"Look. Take the rockets. You knew where to send them. How?"

"Well ... I just knew the layout of the house and grounds. Come to think of it, how did I know?"

"Probably from Arnie - or more likely Chris himself. Doesn't matter. You knew that off to our right was sea. Without that, I might have send the ruddy missile into a town or anywhere!"

Further discussion was put on hold for the moment as we were looking at empty plates. The staff cleared these away and began to produce a sweet course. Louise and the others joined us in that and the dinner party began to continue as if nothing had happened.

Eventually we got to the port and cigars stage. Well, port anyway. The cigars must have been optional. We moved to a nice living room with lots of nice comfy chairs. I was beginning to like Lady Louise. While the older people had coffee, she asked for, and got, a mug of hot chocolate. We must have looked hopeful because she laughed and asked for three more mugs for us. It was during this that Arnie appeared.

"Can I give you a report sir?"

"By all means. Please do."

"It seems they were more people from ETA. It's not clear at the moment if it was a continuation of the operation in Lille, or if it was simply a revenge attack for the humiliation they suffered at the hands of three young girls." He paused for a little laughter, then continued.

"The local police have involved the local militia. Extensive questioning will hopefully reveal the whereabouts of any more of their gang in the local area. Personally, I think that unlikely, these people tend not to talk, and we can't force them - not legally at any rate."

I'd just had a quite interesting idea. "Lisa," I 'said', "What if you give one of them a direct order to tell us everything? What d'you think'll happen?"

"Mm. Don't know. Might be interesting to try." She went on in a normal voice. "Arnie? When I shouted down your radio, what happened?"

"Ah, strange. Everybody did exactly what you said. Without question. Does that mean what I think it means?"

"What do you think it means?"

"I think that if you give an order, people have to do as you say, they have no choice. Is it part of all the other stuff?"

"As far as we can tell, yes. That seems to be the case. We think it might be interesting to order one of the men to talk and see what happens."

"The men are being held by the garrison in the naval base in Toulon. Do you want me to arrange for you to try?"

"Yes. I think we should at least try. If we don't, then they might try again. You'd either end up as prisoners in your own house, or have to go back to England."

"But won't that make you very late getting home? As I understand it you were to be home by tomorrow evening at the latest," said Louise's dad.

I saw Arnie grin as Lisa said, "We'll have enough time. The way we plan to go home will only take us a couple of hours. We can spend the morning at the prison with no problem."

"Two hours! It takes longer than that to get to the airport in Marseille."

"We don't need a plane. Perhaps a little demonstration?" As she finished speaking, Lisa let herself lift out of the chair. She sat in mid air, about a foot above the chair, still in a seated position.

There were several sharp intakes of breath. The sudden silence was broken by Louise. She clapped her hands wildly. "See? I told you they were brilliant. Now do you believe me?"

"I don't think we have much choice, dear," said her mum with a grin.

Lisa let herself down into the chair again. She turned to Arnie, who was still grinning, and said, "Can you arrange it for just after breakfast?"

"I'll get on it right away." He turned to the others. "If there's nothing else sir?"

"Thank you, no. Do carry on."

Arnie nodded, turned and left the room.

Now there was something else I needed to deal with. "Would you mind terribly if I leave you and go to bed. It's been a long and tiring day, at some points anyway."

"I think I'd like to join Jody, if you don't mind," said Lisa. "What about you Holly?"

"Mm. Yes please. Need matchsticks to hold the eyes open while I sleep here otherwise."

There was quiet laughter at that. "Not a problem at all. Can you find your way back to your room?"

"I'd think so, thank you sir. We'll see you in the morning."

The two men stood as we did. They remained standing as we left the room. Naturally, we knew exactly where our room was. Or at least Lisa did, which amounted to the same thing anyway.

Within minutes we were side by side in just one of the beds. I seemed to be asleep in seconds.